

Vinaya Piṭaka in Buddhist Religious Literature

Basic religious literature of the Buddhists consists of three distinct collections which are severally known as Dhamma, Vinaya and Abhidhamma. They are all at least two thousand years old. Dhamma consists essentially of the teachings of the Master himself which pertain to his world view, i.e. the cosmic totality, including all life with humans therein. Extra-terrestrial life is not excluded. Sharing his views with the Indians of the day, he knew even of the Big Bang and the Big Crunch. But the Dhamma's main teachings are about the dimensions of the life of man, its origin, its present continuance and its future in the total life process in terms of the good or bad nature of the life he lives here. Dhamma details out his way of salvation, essentially through his own endeavor at self-correction.

Vinaya is specifically related to the guidance of the lives of bhikkhus and bhikkunis, i.e. those men and women, who opt a monastic life of renunciation who choose to leave behind totally their household lives, of husbands and wives and children, and all connected possessions, in search of a higher religious ideal. The word Vinaya means regulations. The Vinaya has two areas of being prescriptive and descriptive. It lays down regulatory rules of conduct called sikkhāpada, 220 for monks and 304 for nuns, indicating what monks and nuns should not do. These rules of discipline fall into seven categories according to the severity of the offences in their breach. This constitutes a unique law enforcement authority, more or less self-operative, anywhere in the world, enabling prosecution and punishment. This section is called the Vibhanga Vinaya.

The latter descriptive section of the Vinaya details out procedure with regard to admission of new members into the two different orders, style of life in the community, eating habits, manner of dress, care of the sick, mutual relations between the male and female orders, conduct of monastic rituals etc. etc. This

body of literature is called the Khandhaka Vinaya.

In the enforcement of the discipline of the Buddhist Vinaya Piṭaka, the the Order of the Nuns is placed in the subservient position of acting under the guidance of the Monk Order.

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Buddhist Religious Literature 2

The unmistakable message of Buddhism to the world is to make it known to every one that it is placed before the world for the weal and welfare of gods and men: *atthāya hitāya deva-manussānaṃ*. It is even declared to be like a raft for the purpose of crossing over the deluge of worldly continuance: *nītharanatthāya*. The Buddha dispatched his first sixty disciples of whom he was confident that they were as qualified as himself for this mission. The sole purpose of this was that all beings be liberated from the miseries of existential continuance that every being inherits.

Thus his first teachings which came to be called *dhamma* [or *dharma* in current English usage now] centers on the unsatisfactory nature [*dukkha*] of human life and the possibility of its total elimination [*nirodha*], by each one through his or own resourcefulness. The vast body of literature covering this area of practical work in the religion, together with other intimate details of his own exemplary life and that of his disciples, was more or less completed during his life time of forty-five years. Today, this goes under the name of the Sutta Piṭaka.

Closely coupled with this came the Vinaya Piṭaka, historically the second in point of time of its genesis.

During the life time of the Buddha himself, there seems to have originated both explanatory and analytical studies on these original teachings, particularly of the Dhamma category. These concern themselves with psychology, epistemology and metaphysical issues. There is no evidence to show that this group, in the early days of the Order, acquired for itself a classificatory name. But the studies apparently did continue and develop into the present third division under name of Higher or Super Dhamma Studies, producing the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

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